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LETTER DATED 27 AUGUST 1997 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF RWANDA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit the text of the statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of Rwanda in response to the recent massacre of 148 innocent Congolese refugees who were in the Mudende refugee camp of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the prefecture of Gisenyi, Rwanda.

The Congolese refugee victims were slaughtered by former Rwandan soldiers and the infamous Interahamwe militia who recently came from the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The statement of the Government of the Republic of Rwanda is an important contribution to the work of the United Nations Security Council in the search for a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding the criminal killing of the Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese refugees in Gisenyi, Rwanda.

I should be grateful if the letter and the annexed statement could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Gideon KAYINAMURA
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

[Original: French]

Statement of 26 August 1997 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation on the massacre of Congolese refugees in the prefecture of Gisenyi, by the Interahamwe militia and Rwandan ex-soldiers, in the night of 21/22 August 1997

In the night of 21/22 August 1997, a number of Congolese refugees were massacred in the Mudende refugee camp, in Gisenyi prefecture. A total of 148 people were killed. Ex-soldiers and Interahamwe militiamen recently returned from former Zaire perpetrated this crime.

It should be recalled that the mostly Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese refugees had been benefiting from the hospitality of the Government and the people of Rwanda, particularly since the beginning of 1996.

At that time, tens of thousands of Congolese nationals had been driven from Rutshuru, Masisi and Walikare, their native regions in northern Kivu, by Rwandan ex-soldiers and militiamen who had perpetrated the 1994 acts of genocide.

Paradoxically, these perpetrators of crimes against humanity, wrongly admitted to former Zaire as refugees, carried out acts of violence and massacres in their place of asylum, in northern Kivu and later in southern Kivu.

The massacre of the 148 Congolese refugees at Mudende in the night of 21/22 August 1997 was a continuation of the acts of genocide exported to former Zaire by Rwandan ex-soldiers and militiamen, particularly from November 1995 to September 1996.

These further acts of genocide were all the more criminal in that those responsible for the previous acts of genocide now sought out their earlier victims in their refugee camp in Rwanda.

The above-mentioned massacre took place as the Congolese refugees were preparing to return to their country. The Congolese and Rwandan authorities were already taking steps to facilitate the refugees' repatriation, in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The Government of the Rwandese Republic strongly condemns this ignoble and cowardly act against innocent refugees. It also reiterates its sincere condolences to the Congolese Government and people and to the families of the victims.

The Government of Rwanda joins the Kinshasa authorities in expressing its concern for the refugees, as it did when the Congolese Minister, the Honourable Richard Mbaya, visited the site of the massacre, soon after the perpetration of the crime.

Rwanda wishes, moreover, to assure the refugees that appropriate steps have already been taken to guarantee their safety at the Mudende camp.

Furthermore, the Government of Rwanda takes this opportunity to denounce certain external lobbies, which have recently engaged in a disinformation campaign concerning the violence perpetrated in north-eastern Rwanda by ex-soldiers and militiamen of the old regime, who were responsible for the acts of genocide committed in Rwanda in 1994.

By means of both oral and written statements given wide media coverage recently, these same external circles have sought to foist on the Rwandan Patriotic Army part of the blame for the killings of civilians in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi prefectures.

Rwanda calls to witness the diplomats accredited to Kigali who visited the north-western part of the country on 23 July 1997 to see the situation for themselves. That day they realized that the Rwandan Patriotic Army was confronted by soldiers of the old regime recently returned from former Zaire, and that the Army was determined to protect the civilian population, which was being attacked by these criminals.

On the same occasion, the diplomats were able to ascertain that the Rwandan Patriotic Army was cooperating closely with the local population with a view to re-establishing security in that north-western region bordering on former Zaire.

The Government of Rwanda hereby issues an urgent appeal to the international community and to those who genuinely respect human rights to provide generous assistance, unhesitatingly, to the people of Rwanda in their current efforts to achieve national reconciliation.

These efforts have taken the form of the repatriation of over 3 million refugees in a three-year period. They are now taking the form of the ongoing reintegration of the refugees. They also consist in the eradication of the ideology and mechanisms of exclusion, and in the eradication of impunity, which have cast a blight on Rwandan society for over 30 years.

The Government wishes, in particular, to warn certain external circles that have in the past sided with Rwandan leaders advocating ideologies of exclusion and genocide. It calls on them to cease misleading international public opinion by spreading disinformation on the situation in Rwanda, which cannot possibly be the same as it was prior to July 1994.

Rwanda calls on true defenders of human rights to ensure that the countries of the world, including their own countries, are given accurate information and made aware of the situation, so that they will cooperate with a view to ensuring that the perpetrators of the 1994 acts of genocide, who are still engaging in criminal acts, are arrested and brought to trial.

The Government reaffirms its determination to protect its whole population, as well as the foreign community in Rwanda, including the refugee community from neighbouring countries, whose members will in due course be able to be repatriated in appropriate circumstances.

(Signed) Anastase GASANA
Minister for Foreign Affairs
and Cooperation